



HAAGA-HELIA

University of Applied Sciences

SCHOOL OF VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

# STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH PROGRAM

– With an Epilogue on the Counselors' Perspective  
by Leena Härkäpää & Riitta Larna



HAAGA-HELIA  
DISCUSSION  
3/2009



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# Sales of the publication

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# Contents

Vocational Teacher Education in English .....	5
Abstract .....	6
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2 Qualitative Evaluation Study of the English Program in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education ....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3 Entry Requirements, Objectives and Content of Studies in the English Program .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4 Development towards Personal Orientation and Intercultural Competence in Teaching .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>5 Findings .....</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1 Learning in the English Group – strengthened teacher identities and collaboration in a student centered atmosphere .....	22
5.2 Practical orientation is lacking, previous teaching experience is essential .....	25
5.3 Concrete methods must be studied and teaching practice organized flexibly – Development ideas for the English Program.....	27
5.4 Challenge of multiculturalism – aspects of intercultural learning in the English Program and reflections for improved intercultural communication .....	28
<b>6 Discussion .....</b>	<b>34</b>
References .....	38
<b>Epilogue .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Attachments .....	47



# Vocational Teacher Education in English

■ In 2004, we started something new that we had not done before – to establish vocational teacher education in English. Now five years later, it is time to gather feedback and make a summary of how well we have succeeded in our work, how have our students managed in their studies and what we have learned during these years?

International contacts are important in the field of education. It is a question of the quality of education in addition to being a question of learning and developing something new. It is also a question of developing business. Teacher education is a special sector in the field of education. Teacher education is always closely tied to the values, habits, culture and history of a society.

After five years, the teacher education program in English continues to grow in HAAGA-HELIA. This fact gives us confidence that we have done something right. It seems that there is truly a need for the teacher education program in English in the Helsinki metropolitan area. There are many degree programs taught in English in vocational schools and universities of applied sciences. The HAAGA-HELIA Vocational Teacher Education Program in English offers one possibility for foreign specialists to become qualified teachers in Finland. Currently, student teachers in the program have managed well in their studies and many of them are working as teachers.

This publication provides us with important information. However, I hope that it will also give important information to other institutions that are interested in developing their international and multicultural activities.

I want to thank all those people who have developed and implemented the vocational teacher education program in English as well as those individuals who have contributed to this publication. I want to thank all the teachers, especially Irene Hein, Leena Härkäpää, Riitta Larna, David Mauffret and all other staff members for their work. I also want to thank Niina Manninen, who has done the largest share in collecting the material and writing this publication.

*Jari Laukia*

Director

HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences

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# Abstract

■ The purpose of this qualitative study is to evaluate the vocational teacher education in the English Program in the HAAGA-HELIA School of vocational teacher education from students' points of view. The study focuses both on the theme of intercultural learning and on the general evaluation of the English program. The English Program provides the teacher students with a general teacher qualification to work as teachers at all educational levels in Finland but the emphasis of the studies is on vocational education. The English Program is intended for students who plan to work in universities of applied sciences or vocational colleges and who are not proficient in Finnish and want to take their studies in English. How does intercultural learning and multiculturalism appear in the educational practices of the English Program in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education? How former teacher students of the English Program evaluate their studies in HAAGA-HELIA? Multicultural issues have become a topical subject in the Finnish educational field. The need to develop multicultural practices has been addressed in various levels of educational institutions. The student teachers in the English Program come from various cultural backgrounds and most of them have lived in Finland for many years and worked as teachers. They have an important viewpoint for intercultural aspects of education. As a result of this study, it seems that intercultural issues should be taken under discussion and intercultural learning should be instructed more in the English Program. In terms of general evaluation, the former teacher students brought out that more emphasis should be placed on practical matters of teaching.

**Keywords:** Vocational teacher education, English Program, evaluation, intercultural learning, multicultural teams

# Introduction

■ Finland's population is becoming multicultural with constantly growing speed. The need to develop multicultural education has been acknowledged in various platforms. The Government Program of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen is presently setting objectives and strategies for internationalization of the Finnish higher education institutions. According to the strategy there is a need to both increase the quantity of education in English as well as internationalize study contents. Students should be equipped for the challenges of a multicultural society. (Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia, temaattisten työpajojen yhteenveto.) The demands for intercultural preparedness have also been noticed among teacher students. Lahtiranta and Penttilä (2006) studied how vocational teacher education prepares student for their teaching careers, and according to their study more emphasis should be placed on multicultural issues in vocational teacher education.

In Lahtiranta and Penttilä's (2006) and Vähäsantanen's (2004) studies, teacher students in vocational teacher education felt that there is a need to study multicultural issues, but they experienced studying in diverse, multicultural groups rather challenging. In vocational teacher education the professional background of the student teacher is also diverse. In the above mentioned studies, student teacher perceived that there is a need to differentiate teacher education in terms of student teacher's earlier teaching experience and their professional background. Even though studying in a multicultural group can be demanding, the multidisciplinary and multicultural study group can create a forum to examine a variety of ideas in multiple perspectives. If multicultural issues are consciously addressed, multicultural study group can form an ideal starting point for preparing students for their teaching careers in a multicultural society.

Taking these opinions into consideration, it is interesting to have a closer look at the English Program in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education and examine how multicultural issues are experienced by the former teacher students of the English Program. First, the qualitative evaluation study of the English Program (chapter 2) will



be introduced and then theoretical considerations concerning the teacher education and intercultural matters will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4. In chapter five, the results of the study concerning both the general evaluation of the program (chapters 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) and intercultural learning in the English program (chapter 5.4) will be presented.

## 2

# Qualitative Evaluation Study of the English Program in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education

■ Learning is a subjective experience. Nevertheless, students and educational institutions are intertwined in creation of that learning experience. Therefore it is crucial to map students' evaluation of the quality of education and teaching. Students are in the best position to evaluate how their learning needs are taken into account in their education. Often, mere numerical feedback and evaluation of a course or program provides little, if any information on, how the organization of learning should be improved in order to better meet the needs of students. Qualitative evaluation from a student's point of view is required to holistically develop educational programs. (Karjalainen & Alaniska 2006.) Students are experts of their own learning and can assess how educational programs provide conditions for their learning. The students' interpretation of their learning environment affects their choice of learning methods and feelings about the quality of education. (Saari 2002, 97, 99.)

There has not been a reported evaluation of the English Program. However, some feedback has been given by the students. According to students' feedback of the English Program in fall 2005, the students were very satisfied with the program. The only issues that students were not so satisfied with was web-based learning and making use of HELIA's (present HAAGA-HELIA) R&D-resources. Overall, the feedback was positive and the assignments in the English Program were felt as developmental and useful. (Questionnaire English-Arttuli 2005 of five students.) In questionnaire-type feedback students quite rarely answer open questions and provide developmental ideas. Therefore, it is important that the English Program is also studied and evaluated qualitatively.

Group interviews were used as a research method in this study. Thirty three students have completed their vocational teacher training in the English Program during 2004-2007 and all of them were invited for the group interviews (See attachment 1: Invitation to the group interview). Three interview sessions were organized and eleven people took part in them. The selection criterion for the interviewees was graduation from the English Program by August 2008. The interviewees, former teacher students of the English Program come from diverse cultural backgrounds and most of them have lived in Finland for many years. The interviewees can be defined as mature students according to their age and situations in life; many of them were in the situation during the English Program, there they had to combine work, studies and family life. The interviewees had varying occupational backgrounds.

The themes of discussion were selected on the grounds of earlier research on vocational teacher education, intercultural competence and intercultural learning. The interviewees took part in the interview situations voluntarily. The interview groups met only once. The themes which were discussed in the interviews were (See attachment 2):

- General evaluation of the English Program
- Multicultural issues and intercultural learning in the English Program
- Development ideas for the English Program.

The reason for group interviews to be chosen as a research method instead of personal interviews was that group interviews often lead to reminiscing. In reminiscing the group stimulates each other's opinions and evaluations. The group interview is also useful when there is a need to develop practices and gather developmental ideas. Homogenous group of interviewees is also seen positively in terms of group discussion. (Eskola & Suoranta, 2005, 95-96.) In this study the interviewees were homogenous in a sense that they all had finished their vocational teacher education in the English Program. In an interview situation the interviewees are negotiating their truthful memories and interpretations (Makkonen 2006, 2). In this study the negotiation and the interpretations concerned evaluation of the English Program.

The group interviews which were held in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed material, 40 pages of interview material was analyzed by using thematic analysis. The present author conducted the interviews as an external evaluator (intern from the University of Helsinki, Department of Education) in HAAGA-HELIA. The group interviews were successful in terms of participation rate (33% of invited) and the extensiveness of

the discussions. The interviewees seemed to discuss openly about their views of the English Program and helped each other in reminiscing their learning experiences.

The interview material of the group interviews was coded according to the three main themes of the interviews. Those views of the interviewees which seemed to recur in the interviews are introduced in this report. Quotes of the interviewees are brought out in order to enrich the reporting and help the reader to evaluate the study.

It has to be kept in mind while considering the results of this study that the qualitative sample, interview material of the three group interviews, was quite small. A more extensive research might be needed in the area of intercultural learning and improving intercultural communication, for example, from a teacher's point of view. In an evaluation which is based on group interviews, one also has to take into account the social aspects of the interviews: interviewer and interviewees' roles in the interview situations. In the group interviews there may be dominant persons who direct conversations and create social pressure for others to conform to their opinions. In this study, the interviews were semi structured which lessened this type of social pressure. The same questions were addressed to every group but the order of the questions was sometimes different. Everyone had their chance to answer the questions. The timetable for the discussions was limited and the interviewer took a role of a facilitator and moderator of the discussions. During the interviews it was made sure that everyone was able to take part in the discussions and talk about their experiences in the English Program. In this evaluation, the semi structured group interview seemed to work fine as directing the discussion in certain themes but at the same time allowing the interviewees to speak about issues which they experienced as being most important.

As an external evaluator, the author had no pre-established notions of the vocational teacher education in HAAGA-HELIA. However, the author has taken a degree in teacher education at University of Helsinki which focuses on adult education and due to these experiences of teacher education, she had an idea which issues might concern the teacher students. Taking this into consideration, the author tried to stand as firmly as possible in the role of an interviewer and allowed the interviewees to speak freely of their conceptions of the teacher education to make sure that the study is as reliable as possible.

The interview groups were mixed in a sense that there were participants of different classes of the English Program. The program started in 2004 and since then many developments have already been made and students' development ideas have been taken into account when planning

the program further. It seemed though, that despite the representation of different classes in the group interviews, the interviewees' evaluations of the English Program concentrated on the same themes, which are been discussed in this report. In evaluating an educational program students usually consider the evaluation in comparison to their own specific learning needs and motives. For interviewees in this study the goals and motives to study in the English program seemed to be quite practical, as getting the certificate and learning practical teaching methods.

### 3

## Entry Requirements, Objectives and Content of Studies in the English Program

■ Vocational teacher education in SLK (Suomen Liikemiesten Kauppaopisto, Finnish Business College), nowadays the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education, has existed for almost 60 years, and has about a fifteen year tradition in multidisciplinary vocational teacher education. The HELIA School of Teacher Education, which was part of HELIA University of Applied Sciences, was founded in 1997. Later on, in 2007 the structural development of the higher education system led to the establishment of the new HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education. The English Program offers general pedagogical qualification for teaching at all educational levels in Finland, but the emphasis is on vocational education. Vocational teacher education is intended for teachers who work or intend to work at universities of applied sciences (or polytechnics) and institutions of vocational education. According to Act 356/2003, a person with the education and work experience required for a teaching post at a polytechnic or an institute of vocational education can be admitted to vocational teacher education. (Vocational Teacher Education, Applicant's guide.)

Entry requirements are as follows:

### ***Qualification Requirements for Polytechnic Teachers (Act 351/2003 and Decree 352/2003)***

To be qualified for a principal lecturer's position at a polytechnic, one must have a relevant licentiate's or doctoral post-graduate degree. A relevant master's degree is required from senior lecturers. For a specific reason, subsection 1 notwithstanding, a person with a master's degree may be appointed to the post of principal lecturer, and a person without a master's degree to the post of senior lecturer, if this person is very familiar with the subject area of the post. (Ibid.)

Principal lecturers and senior lecturers whose tasks mainly include the provision of professional studies are, in addition, to have at least three years of practical experience in duties consistent with the degree (Ibid).

***Qualification Requirements for Vocational Subject Teacher Education (Decree 986/1998)***

The qualifications required from teachers providing instruction in vocational subjects are 1) a relevant master's or polytechnic degree. If there is no relevant master's or polytechnic degree, the highest degree offered in the field, corresponding to the teaching position decided by the provider of the education; 2) teacher's pedagogical education of at least 35 credit units (60 credit points); 3) a minimum of three years of work experience in a field corresponding to the teaching position. (Ibid.)

A relevant master's degree is required for vocational teacher education in the field of business and administration, as well as in social services and health. If there is no relevant master's degree, a relevant polytechnic degree is accepted. Persons who have completed at least three years of relevant studies in an educational institution in Finland or abroad, and who have artistic or other professional merit in the field, are also eligible for teacher education within the fields of communication, visual arts, theatre, and dance. (Ibid.)

***Qualification Requirements for General Subject Teacher Education in Vocational Education (Decree 986/1998)***

The instruction, aiming to develop and complement professional skills, offered in Finnish, Swedish, foreign languages, mathematics, natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, sports and other practical and art subjects, as well as that of health education, can be provided by a person who 1) has got a master's degree with at least 55 credit units (82.5 credit points) or equivalent studies in one of the subjects he/she teaches plus at least 35 credit units (52.5 credit points) or equivalent studies in the other subjects he/she teaches; or has got the degree of Master of Science in Technology in a relevant degree program; and 2) has completed teacher's pedagogical education of at least 35 credit units (60 credit points). (Ibid.)

A relevant degree of higher education provides qualifications for teaching posts in the following specific areas: practical and art subjects except for sports, humanities and social sciences, information and communication technology included in mathematics and natural sciences, and health education (Ibid).

### ***Defining the objectives of the English Program***

The main objective of the English Program in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education is to respond to the demands for vocational teacher education in English. In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, universities of applied sciences started to have degree programs in English, which led English speaking professionals entering in different occupational fields. Some of these professionals wanted to take a teacher education and get an official certificate to teach in Finland and the English Program was established for this purpose. Another important objective of the English Program was to strengthen the internationalization of the vocational teacher education in HAAGA-HELIA; create bonds and networks in an international level which then radiates the diversity to the field of education. (Interview of Jari Laukia, director of the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education on October the 29<sup>th</sup> 2008)

The planning of the English Program started in 2003 and in spring 2004 the first teacher students entered the program. The idea of the English Program was to provide teacher education to those people who have moved to Finland and would stay and work here permanently. The content of the studies was transferred to the English Program from the Finnish teacher education program. A lot of interest and demand was shown for the English Program already from the very beginning and the feedback of the program has been positive. There have been many applicants for the English Program and most of the students have graduated on time.

According to Jari Laukia, director of the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education, the English Program has worked well because of the great staff. The counselors in the program are open-minded, competent and interested in intercultural issues and teaching in English. The counselors of the English Program, like everyone else in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education have not been afraid to face the challenges of internationalization and changes in the field of vocational education. (Ibid.)

Providing the English Program is justified in many terms. It helps the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education to be profiled as an international and dynamic institution. It has also affected on the overall atmosphere of the HAAGA-HELIA School of vocational teacher education by bringing out diversity. One of the main ideas in the HAAGA-HELIA School of vocational teacher education is that the whole staff is learning in interaction with each other and with the teacher students. Through the English Program the whole staff has learned a lot from other cultures. The English Program has been groundbreaking in many terms. “We are looking into the future and valuing diversity and everyone’s contribution



to our education. By standing firmly in our roots and valuing our own culture, we can value others and respect the diversity that multicultural study groups bring to our community.” (Ibid.)

#### Content of the studies in the English Program

There might be slight changes in the curriculum since the education in the English Program started in 2004, but the overall content of teacher studies (60 credits) for the interviewees was as follows:

- Basic Studies in Pedagogy (20 cr)
- Basic Studies in Vocational Pedagogy (13 cr)
  - Orientation to Development as a Vocational Instructor (4 cr)
  - Introduction to Vocational Teaching (5 cr)
  - The Analysis of Vocational Learning and Instruction (4 cr)
- Teaching Practice (10 cr)
- Developmental Studies (17 cr)
  - Towards a Research Approach in Teaching (5 cr)
  - Elective Studies (5 cr)
  - Developmental Project (7 cr)

Some of the student teachers in the English Program had received credit for the basic studies in pedagogy and they did not take those studies in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education. Whether students have taken the basic studies in pedagogy elsewhere or in HAAGA-HELIA they should become familiar with the basic concepts and theories in pedagogy during those studies. The studies form the theoretical basis for the studies in vocational pedagogy. The objective is to bring together teaching and theory.

The basic studies in pedagogy (20 cr) introduce the following themes:

- Basic Concepts and Research in Education
- Educational Practices in Finland
- Philosophy and Education
- Learning and the Work place
- The Psychology and Didactics of Learning

(Vocational Teacher Education Curriculum and Student Guide 2006-2007)

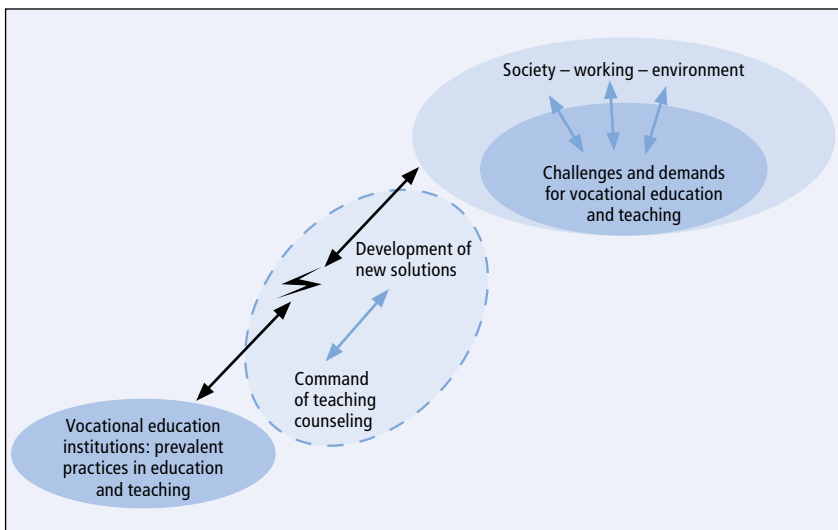
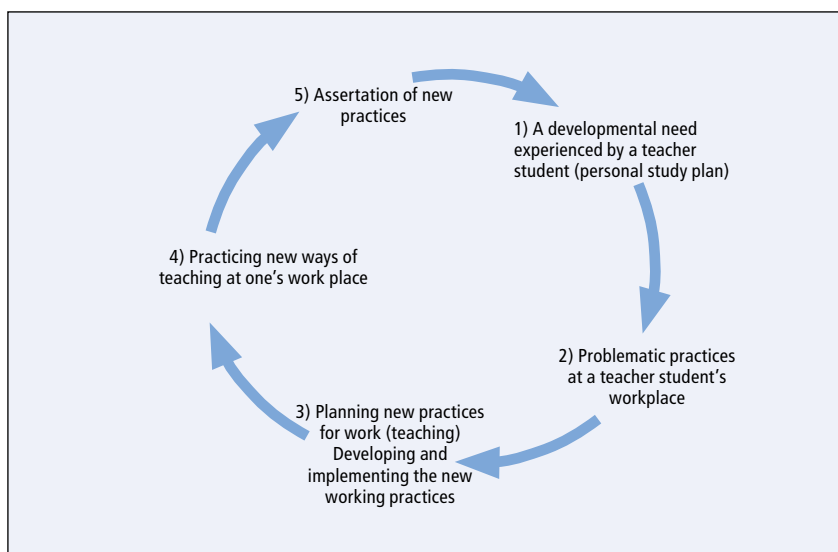


Figure 1: Defining the main goal of vocational teacher education (Vocational Teacher Education Curriculum and Student Guide 2006-2007, 9)

### ***An Example of a Learning Task in the English Program: Developmental Project (7 credits)***

Beside teaching practice, the assignment called developmental project is an important learning task for the student teachers in the English Program. In the developmental project, student teachers develop educational practices in different organizations and educational institutions. Learning in the project is based on the idea of a cyclic learning process at work.



Learning cycle in Vocational Teacher Education (customisation based on Vaso and Vertanen's (2000,31) model)

The learning cycle which is based on Vaso and Vertanen's (2000, 31) model emphasizes the idea that most of the teacher students in vocational teacher education have work experience as a teacher and can therefore develop the teaching practices at their work place. The purpose of the developmental project is to collaboratively produce new solutions for the needs of teachers, educational institutions and employment. The learning objectives are to acquire a research and development approach in work as well as the skills to critically assess the appropriateness and feasibility of developmental methods and solutions produced. It is important that the developmental project has validity for actual development needs as well as being associated with earlier research and development. (Vocational Teacher Education Curriculum and Student Guide 2006-2007, 22-23.)

## 4

# Development towards Personal Orientation and Intercultural Competence in Teaching Profession

■ Growth towards personal orientation in teaching can be seen as a long process. Vocational teacher education provides ideally a starting point for a lifelong development of teacher students. (Jääskeläinen 2007.) According to Vähäsantanen's (2004) evaluative research on vocational teacher education, teacher students felt that they had understood the significance of lifelong learning during the teacher education and gained some insight into their personal teacher orientation. They felt that constructivist and collaborative learning forms an ideal base for teacher education.

To be able to understand teaching in practice, teacher students need theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning processes. A knowledgeable teacher has formed his/her own theory of practice on the grounds of these theories and personal teaching experiences. Teacher education should form a platform for the reflection of these cumulative experiences in teaching. (Jääskeläinen 2007.) Reflective skills are required in constantly changing, diverse and multicultural working environments. Teacher education should promote these reflective skills and emphasize understanding of interaction and promote skills to deal with challenging situations at work (Saari 2002, 196).

Nowadays, a teacher is facing multiculturalism more or less on an everyday basis. He/she is both meeting students with various ethnic backgrounds and educating people to work in multicultural societies. Collaborating in intercultural level also calls for intercultural competence of a teacher. (Metsänen 2007, 208.) What then is the intercultural competence?

Intercultural competence is based on knowledge, awareness and skills of promoting intercultural interaction in an effective and successful way. Personal factors form an important part of the intercultural competence and it can be developed through well-defined training interventions in a long-term process (Manninen 2008). A teacher should become aware

of the factors of intercultural competence in order to develop one's own competence in the area. He/she should know, for example, how different cultures have developed politically and historically, and how they differ in terms of factors such as individuality-collectivity, democracy-authoritativeness, time management and power distance (see Hofstede 1993). It is also important to know how globalization affects professions, work and society in general (Varis 2006 according to Metsänen 2007, 213).

Awareness of one's cultural origins, attitudes and values is an important base for the intercultural competence. Facing ambiguities in multicultural environments, challenges one to reflect on one's own cultural background. To be able to deal with varying needs of different students, a teacher should also be pedagogically flexible and act accordingly in different contexts by taking into account the contextual and cultural factors of a situation at hand. A teacher should also be open for interaction with ethnically different people and be emotionally balanced in order to develop his/her intercultural competence. (Metsänen 2007, 212-216.) Interculturally competent teacher must also work on his/her openness to other ways of thinking, ability to deal with anxiety and the ability to adapt to different kinds of teams. (Marx 1999, 152 according to Korhonen 2002, 31).

Development of intercultural competence is a slow, gradual and transformative learning process consisting of intercultural training, hands-on experiences of other cultures and their people. Knowledge and understanding of one's own culture, i.e. self awareness, is of major importance in this process. Critical reflection is a key to develop this self awareness. Critical reflection is defined by Mezirow (1991) as being a searching view of the unquestioningly accepted presuppositions that we have learned through socialization process. Transformative learning involves becoming more reflective and critical, being more open to the perspectives of others, and being less defensive and more accepting of new ideas. (Mezirow 1991; Taylor 1994 according to Korhonen 2002, 36, 48.)

Multicultural issues should be addressed in every level of teaching starting from curriculums, study contents, materials and teaching methods (Pitkänen 2004, 110). It is important that teacher students' self knowledge is developed during the teacher education so that the teacher students are better able to develop their intercultural competence. The development of self knowledge requires forums for reflection during the teacher education. (Metsänen 2007, 219.)

In creation of forums for reflection, it is important that everyone can contribute to the common task under discussion, share knowledge and communicate experience and stimulate team learning. Successful institutions and employees are those who see cultural diversity as an opportunity rather than as a threat, as something that can be learned and made use of, as an opportunity to higher productivity, and development of intercultural competence. (Korhonen 2002, 33, 35.)

## 5 Findings

### 5.1 Learning in the English Group – strengthened teacher identities and collaboration in a student centered atmosphere

■ The English Program was seen positively in terms of how it was organized in practice. The curriculum was considered as well-defined and practical arrangements worked well during the English Program.

I3: For me this program was fantastic, it was very well arranged with very good teachers, caring, (- -) and it was based on inquiry, the classes use to be for inquires about knowledge.

I1: I think that the program was organized very well.

One former teacher student of the program mentioned that he learned the organization of an educational program through observing the organization of the English Program.

I5: The positive thing about the program was that it was nicely planned and it was accessible and it was accessible right from the very day, you know, you could see what the program was about and it was structured nicely and simply described, how the brochure was presented and when we knew all the contact days, it was no trouble at all to follow the program, to join it and this. And in that way, learning how to organize a program and see how the courses were designed and described in advance, and we never had problems like, so for me it was a learning experience in itself, how to run an educational program, not in terms of content or something but even, just the practical matters and that was a success.

In this example, an interviewee had learned the organization of an educational program through a “hidden curriculum” by observing how HAAGA-HELIA organizes its teacher education. It is important to notice that adult learners do not only learn what they are consciously taught but also subliminally by observing the way things are taught and what kind of “hidden” messages educators are sending about the teaching profession.

Student centeredness of the English Program was also valued. The interviewees saw the teachers of the English Program as facilitators of

learning, not traditional teachers who give mere lectures and have no connection with the students' lived experiences. The interviewees characterized the student centeredness in the English Program as making use of the student teachers' prior experiences and giving them freedom to study those areas of teaching in which they were interested in. Collaborative group learning and discussions were highlighted in the English Program.

I11: I think the emphasis was on the activity as opposed simply just delivering lectures and forcing people to listen, it was very good, I took away a lot of ideas about how to increase activity and great, static classes.

I11: we had quite a lot of freedom to design projects and do things which were interesting and relevant to us, so in that way, the course was what we made of it.

I5: Mostly we discussed something and then we got very passionate about some issues, and people would always drop their personal life experiences and so.

I6: I think because the whole program was operated in by learning by doing, or I think it was, more like problem based learning in a way (- -), so the teachers were like facilitators, and this helped me a lot in teaching in the university because we are doing the same.

For many of the interviewees who studied in the English Program and had earlier teaching experience the certificate received from the program was highly appreciated.

I2: Frankly I think that those of us who came into the program as functionally competent teachers became better recognized as functionally competent teachers through the program. And the program is very, very much needed in that purpose alone.

Recognition as a qualified teacher affected positively and increased the interviewees' self-esteem. For some, the English Program helped to develop their teacher identity.

I1: Very spontaneously I would say that after this program I could say that okay now I am a teacher and I have a certificate and I have participated in this program and from now on I am a teacher, so I must have found my teacher identity.

(- -) My self esteem helped me after I graduated and I could say that now I am a licensed teacher and if I say something, I mean to my colleagues, to my students, at my working place, I had like more power to influence some new ideas or something like this.

I3: The program helped me to develop my teacher identity. My capabilities, my handling of modern methods and coming from far away, to get more self confident.



Those students who had prior experiences in teaching had already formed their teacher identity during their years in teaching and did not experience that the teacher education changed their view of themselves as a teacher, at least not in any dramatic way. Nevertheless, their teacher identity was strengthened during the studies in the English Program.

I6: I think that now I know better what I am doing, but I was doing this before.

I5: Some aspects were strengthened (of my teacher identity).

Learning is an individual process and one's expectations and motives affect the learning in many ways. For most of the interviewees, practical issues in teaching which they had learned during the English Program were the most important ones. Learning concrete teaching methods was valued more than learning theoretical approaches of teaching. The interviewees described their learning experiences through concrete methods that they had learned during the English Program:

I1: As I mentioned the new thing for me, which I came across absolutely for the first time was the CLIL, content and language integrated learning, as such, as an expression, and then I became interested and then I got the idea and I started working on it, and it is taking now all my time, I mean, I am working on it and I am doing it at my college, but this was the new thing that I learned during the education.

I3: I learned a team work method, for example. Team work is today's slogan in teaching, and this course supplied us with that, team work is very important in teaching and peer work method.

I4: During the EP I learned especially teaching in kinesthetic way for the kinesthetic learners. I was very enthusiastic about learning different types of the methods to teach those students who (- -) would learn either by doing or by using kinesthetic methods.

Many of the interviewees experienced the networking in the English Program very influential in terms of learning. Contacts with the teacher student colleagues and the instructors of the English Program were defined as being very important. There is a need to network and create contacts during the teacher education. And for foreigners the need might be even stronger than for Finns who have already established their contacts in many areas of life. The English Program created an important forum for socialization and sharing ideas with likeminded people.

I8: Networking. When I left the program with my teacher training diploma, I was leaving a lot of people behind me and I had phone numbers and I knew that okay if something happens we can help each others. Not everybody in the group was like that, but still a few people were.

I10: For me the program was excellent because it was not only important thing for me what the teachers were saying but the contact with the people who were in the course, so, what they were thinking. They have taught in their own countries, and this interaction with the people for me was also 50% of importance in the program. 50% of it was pedagogical things that I got from the program.

## 5.2 Practical orientation is lacking, previous teaching experience is essential

Teacher Education should encourage teacher students to reflect on themselves by giving them theoretical tools for reflection (Wesselink, Land, Mulder & Biemans 2003 according to Ruohotie 2007, 378). Nevertheless, teacher education is often criticized, of not providing the tools for practical matters in teaching. This opinion was brought out in this study as well. The interviewees experienced that they would have needed more practice and implementations of methods which were mainly discussed in theory. The interviewees perceive teaching competence as practical knowledge of teaching methods, such as presentation skills. This practicality was felt as being underrepresented in the English Program.

I1: I had expectations about some concrete, something like how to handle a situation, how to motivate the students, and nothing like this happened, we haven't had this, this specific field. The program was too theoretical in some ways.

I5: there was no direct implementation to practice; we didn't experiment too much with theories. In a way, we read about them and we discussed them, but it would be nice to do it in a more constructive way.

I6: Each group should take an example of real life and say okay, this is the method and how it was applied. (- -) I needed more real like, we have to apply the methods more in real life.

I3: Lectures should sometimes give us concrete things, and explain what things mean in practice, the tools should be explained for us.

According to the interviewees the English Program was too theoretical at least for those teacher students who did not have previous experiences in teaching nor a teacher position during the studies. In the evaluation of the English Program the interviewees divided the English Group in terms of those teacher students who had prior experiences in teaching and those who did not have the experience. In reality the organization of the groups in the English Program was not necessarily in terms of previous teaching experience but this division was clear in the interviewees' minds. The interviewees noted that to be able to learn efficiently in the English

Program a teacher student should have teaching experiences which can be related to the theoretical knowledge of learning and teaching.

I2: The English Program did not give you the competence to do the teaching if you did not have certain amount of experience in it. If the people have prior experience in teaching, then the program works.

I9: I think that what we all gravitated in our clicks was that there were ones who did research projects and not really teaching and they gravitated together, and those who were teaching gravitated together or basically it changed the dynamics in that way, for me, I got a lot out of it from the other teachers but I reckon that people who haven't got that much of teaching experience, I don't know how much they got out of it.

I8: it was more people, who had already a job and who were teachers already, and their experiences were really used, which was fair enough but I think that the others' experiences should be used as well.

One of the interviewees brought out that the numerical assessment of some learning tasks would be needed in the English Program to make sure that everyone has learned the main ideas which are taught in the program.

I10: This kind of theoretical studies are something that you must check if everyone is following your teaching or not, because there were no assessment, only kind of home works that we made and passed (- -) but in some cases I think the assessment is important. For some chapters, for some modules, not for all, you should have assessment.

The interviewees saw also that they should have studied something about learning disabilities and about the different age groups as learners in the English Program. Even though the vocational teacher education mainly focuses on adult learning, the interviewees' opinion was that they might have to work in the other areas of education as well, and therefore know something about all age groups as learners.

I5: As for guidance counseling and teaching competence we did not have any coverage of psychological, physiological issues, gender equality and this complex issues that evolve human interaction in the classroom, and I am thinking also different age groups, we have teenage people as students, all this, when you have aggressiveness how to handle this, we did not have that in the English Program.

I3: The teacher training should contain also other than adult learning, some issues of young people as learners and so on, curriculum should deal with, for example, kindergarten and so, because sometimes life requires that a teacher once has to go to work in kindergarten to know how to teach there, some practical things for all ages is very important, to kids, youngsters and adult, three stages and these should be there (in the English Program) even if it is a small package.

### 5.3 Concrete methods must be studied and teaching practice organized flexibly – Development ideas for the English Program

Because of the theoretical orientation in the English Program the interviewees brought out that they would like to study practical matters of teaching, like teaching methods in the future. Some concrete examples were given on, how to develop the English Program.

I1: I would like to study new methodology: new methods, new things in teaching, practical things.

I7: I would like to study something more practical, for example, I took a course on how to write teaching materials, and that kinds of things are interesting, and telling something about the methods of teaching, I want something practical.

I8: For me, it would be interesting to know, how to use new tools in teaching, like computers and stuff like that, to become confident with those tools.

I4: I find it extremely important to have different types of European Union programs and their results to be delivered to the teachers. (- -) There exist thousand of programs run by the European union money and they develop different type of results and good practices etc, it is alike a fountain where this program should point to these teacher students that go and search for European union programs in your own field or in your own subject and find out about the best practices and find out about the different ideas that they have produced etc.

I4: There would definitely be a need for the book about different vocational methods. Nowadays we receive different methods along the course but however there does not exist a course book which would cover all those methods. If there exists such a book it should be found and used during this program. And this kind of book could be done with European Union money.

Some of the interviewees brought out that it was difficult to find a teaching practice placement in vocational schools and educational institutions. Therefore the teaching practice should be organized more flexibly, for example, as creating possibilities to do the practice in the HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education.

I10: We have so many classes here; a student can just bring his/her laptop and give a lecture of presentation skills or that, for example. (- -) For me, I think we can also create these scenarios (teaching practice) and in this way we don't necessarily have to go to other places to do the teaching practice but we can create something.

## 5.4 Challenge of multiculturalism – aspects of intercultural learning in the English Program and reflections for improved intercultural communication

I3: In my opinion, all teachers in Finland should know about multiculturalism. They should be ready for it to accept it psychologically and mentally because multiculturalism is growing in Finland and the class demands it.

Multiculturalism raised a lot of discussion in the interview groups. Most of the interviewees are working in a multicultural environment and teaching multicultural groups. Multiculturalism is so self evident for many of the interviewees that they don't think about it consciously.

I1: For me multiculturalism is very important part of my life because I teach multicultural students and I am part of multicultural society and multicultural issues are part of my way of life and I don't have to think about it.

I3: Multiculturalism is a philosophy of life for me.

I10: In my lifetime multiculturalism was all around me, because I have many roots myself and I have lived already in three countries, so multiculturalism is in me wherever I am. Multiculturalism for me is a process of my own cultural background and because I am living in a foreign culture I am enriched with the Finnish culture and all the people I am involved, so it is unconsciously developing all the time this process for interculturality and multiculturality.

Interaction with different cultural groups is a good base for the development of intercultural competence. However, it is not enough. One has to take part in intercultural training and consider multicultural issues consciously and practice skills in multicultural situations in order to develop one's intercultural competence. (Manninen 2008.) Discussing cultural differences is beneficial in a multicultural group in terms of enabling people to get to know each other's cultural backgrounds and learn from each other. Attention should be paid in a way how the multicultural issues are brought out in the group. The interviewees saw that instructed discussions about cultural differences might be useful in the English group.

I1: There were no organized discussions of cultural differences in our group but you could notice different ways of thinking, different cultures by listening to the students but especially on this way, on this purpose, we did not discuss about different cultures. I don't think we had this. But I think it would be very useful, for example to discuss like how you teach in different countries.

I10: maybe there can also be some discussion about the people's background culture and what they can tell about themselves, exchange of ideas, you must not leave your curriculum, but this constant exchange between teachers and

students, between the students themselves, not only from one side, but from many sides.

18: We could choose the groups, and even if some people remained in the same groups, some tried to change the groups, so we had to talk to each other and it was quite fun in spite of these difficulties to sometimes understand each other (language difficulties).

A multicultural study group forms an ideal forum for exchange of different cultural values and ideas. Then again, there is always a danger to over emphasize cultural backgrounds in a multicultural group in a way which strengthens stereotypical thinking of different cultures. Stereotypical thinking is often learned in a long-term socialization process and therefore it is difficult to change. The challenges of stereotypical thinking were discussed by the interviewees.

15: I had a problem in studying in a multicultural group. Well, you are facing so many cultures in a way, and very often you fail to see the person behind the culture. Multicultural groups are like that, you may have one person from certain culture and the other from another culture and so, instead of fighting stereotypes we are still inside them in a way if interaction is not guided well enough.

18: Something interesting was, when we had to work by group quite often, but then we could choose the group and what was quite funny that the Africans were together, and then Europeans together and then there were Russians and that it was really funny, the way, how people chose the groups.

19: It was quite funny because there was almost a cliché of all the different nationalities, you know, they were somebody with booming voice and then there a few more reserved people from other countries.

Multicultural teams must use their cultural diversity to generate multiple perspectives, ideas, alternatives, problem definitions and solutions to function effectively. They must also learn to reach consensus and balance the simultaneous needs for divergence and cohesion. To work/study in a multicultural team is not always easy and people should be equipped with skills to sorting out problems of interaction in multicultural situations. (Pitkänen 2004, 111).

Is it possible to avoid stereotypical and categorized thinking when one is studying or working in a multicultural group? In the end, one tends to enclose oneself in a protective sphere and define boundaries between us and them, in-groups and out groups. Social inclusions or exclusions are defined in terms of relations to the in-groups or out groups. Stereotyping is quite rooted in our thinking. It seems an impossible task to get rid of that. In spite of that, what can be done is to negotiate about the rules of communication with different peoples. If cultural differences are ignored,

the potential channels of communication are cut off. If stereotypes and unconscious reactions and cultural prejudices are simply followed, any possibility to communicate, work and interact with people from other cultures is precluded. Evaluative judgments should be let go and these concepts should be used instead to facilitate interaction and effective working relationships. (Garcea 2005, 56-58, 68.)

The interviewees did not experience that they would have needed any formal training of intercultural issues. They were willing to discuss openly about multiculturalism and compare culture bound opinions, for example, about teaching and learning. Comparison is widely used in intercultural learning and it can be used as a method in the English Program as well. Clusters of common cultural variables can be separated and compared in order to define and describe cultural models (Garcea 2005, 59).

I4: One important thing that is needed is comparison, for example, the Finnish education system in comparison to Egyptian system and so on. Because I found out that my group could grasp very quickly into the different type of Finnish systems whilst they compared it to their own home country or to their background or former country where they came from and comparison made many things very easy for them.

I3: I think so too, I have experience of this comparative method. (- -) We learn from others through comparative method. The method involves other cultures and we go towards multiculturalism and these comparative studies should be part of every program.

The interviewees talked about the limited interaction with the Finnish student teachers in the English Program. The student teachers in the English Program would have wanted to interact more with the Finnish student teachers and felt a bit like “a separate island” on the sea of teacher education.

I1: There was definitely not enough interaction with the Finnish students during the program.

I6: we know each others, we are in the same package, we are the foreigners, so we know each other in the streets and shops, but we need Finns to know us and us to know them.

I5: That is the point. We have been put into one boat that is drifting away. You are there, you are multicultural.

In the quote below, the interviewees are discussing the issue of interaction and learning of foreign languages in the English Program:

I6: I think that the participation of Finns for me in the program is the major point, if we are selected like 15 plus 15.

I3: We need updated research in the area of multiculturalism.

I5: I think that a lot of that (intercultural training) goes in to waste basket honestly because it stays in the class room; I think people could be talking about these issues for ages and ages and reality doesn't change. So, I think what the program could do, is just to inspire people to learn, for example, languages (- -) Intercultural training does not change the way you behave with different people, you are still stereotypical, you still subconsciously make those discriminative decisions until you start learning languages because then things start having a meaning for you.

I3: This is absolutely true, because the foreigners should learn Finnish language and Finnish culture.

I5: We have multicultural classrooms where we have people from different cultures, we have to have some language exposure as well, somehow more thought should be put into that, as how to organize these groups in terms of common languages, I am sorry to say, that just by using English we all become Americanized.

I4: What about if they would change this program bilingual? Bilingual in order that everything would be taught at the same time both in Finnish and both in English.

I3: You would probably get fewer responses, because for many who come to the program, they are already teachers and they come here for the certificate and they are tired, so English is so easy for them. For example, my writing in Finnish is horrible.

I5: You are both right in a way. But what I was saying is that, the program doesn't have to teach you Arabic and so, but it has to inspire you to learn language, (- -) so if the program could clearly state this and try to motivate you for that.

Some of the interviewees stressed that language problems caused misunderstandings in the English Group, at least in the beginning when the teacher students did not know each other. Multicultural groups often pose communication problems because there are so many variables unknown to the communicators (Harris & Moran, 1996, 23). Some people might have a strong regional accent and their pace of speaking English can be different from that of the listener. Language barriers are often causing problems in the first instances of meetings between different cultures. In the course of time you usually start understanding each other as this interviewee brought out:

I9: I think that after a while the cultural thing kind of went in to the background because everyone learnt how to understand each other what is their pace, you know, if they are talking slow, is it not because they don't really know but it is their manner, this kind of things, obvious things now to me, but not so much when you see so many diversities at the first time.

In the case of the English Program, how to then make the intercultural communication easier? As in any multicultural group, conscious interven-



tions must be made in order to improve the interaction within the group. As Harris and Moran (1996, 21-22, 38) state, communication is the most important tool that we have for getting things done and therefore the communication skills of the group should be enhanced. An effective communicator is able to build a bridge to the world of the receiver. A person must be aware of the fact that he/she is both a medium and a message of communication and the way in which one communicates is vastly influenced by cultural conditioning. To facilitate our interaction with people who do not share our values, or learned ways of behaving requires intercultural competence, so that the very cultural differences become resources, not obstacles for interaction.

Educational interventions are needed in developing intercultural competence in teaching. Intercultural training should be part of the vocational teacher education, at least in continuing education. In terms of English Program, it could start with having instructed discussion of cultural differences in the group, for example, discussion about the culture bound expectations for teaching. What the interviewees also brought out was that the English Program could organize more informal gatherings where people can learn to know each other.

N: How could we make the interaction between different cultures easier in the English Group?

I6: Couple of nights abroad away from the institute.

I5: Some sort of activities like that.

I6: Going to Stockholm on board and things like that.

I3: More caring, more caring.

I4: There is an idea that every time they have these contact lessons during the first evening of their lessons they should have informal gathering

I6: Saunailta.

I4: Exactly or gathering in a nearby restaurant or so.

I5: Or cooking night.

Multicultural issues are complex and multidimensional. It is impossible to act according to a wide variety of different cultural codes at the same time. What we can do is to try to get to know each other and respect the cultural diversity and negotiate about our common rules of interaction. As BBA Lecturer and Academic Counselor, Elisabeth San Miguel addressed in her presentation in HAAGA-HELIA about multicultural learning, we must define our rules of group work and make our western values

visible for those who are not familiar with them. Quite often we take for granted that our style of thinking and acting in social environments is clear for everyone. Most of the time this is not the case, and to be able to make our interaction better in a multicultural group we have to evaluate ourselves and our rules of interaction and negotiate them with others. There is a great amount of experience of multiculturalism and different cultures in the English Group and we can start learning from each other.

## 6

# Discussion

■ In conclusion of the general evaluation of the English Program, a picture of well-designed, student centered and inquiry based program can be drawn. The teachers in the English Program are facilitators of learning and they represent a new approach in teaching which becomes close to mentoring and supporting developmental learning. As in Vähäsantanen's (2004) research on vocational teacher education, constructivist and collaborative learning in the English Program was experienced very positively. For many of those interviewees who had a teaching job already, the English Program provided them with the official certificate which raised their self esteem and strengthened their previously established teacher identity. The English Program helped the teacher students to gain some insight into their personal teacher orientation which was a result in Vähäsantanen's (2004) study on vocational teacher education as well. Even though the interviewees experienced the English Program as being too theoretical, they had learned some concrete methods of teaching which they thought of as being the most remarkable ones.

Despite the fact, that the interviewees learned some concrete teaching methods during the English Program, they would have wanted to study more of those everyday practicalities of teaching, such as, how to teach people with learning disabilities. They saw that some prerequisites are needed in order to fully benefit from the program. The most important requirement in the interviewees' opinion was the prerequisite of previous teaching experience before taking part in the English Program. A good command of spoken and written English is also needed to actively take part in discussions which are the main components of collaborative learning. Therefore, it is important to emphasize this requirement as one of the selection criterion for the English Program.

The vocational teacher education is based on the idea that teacher students have previous work experience in teaching and they can reflect on those experiences during their teacher education (Jääskeläinen 2007). The developmental learning process is also based on the idea that the student teachers can develop their preexisting working practices and learn by doing

and developing (Vaso & Vertanen 2003). The question of earlier teaching experience seems to be a major issue in vocational teacher education and how to balance between the differing needs of those students who do have some teaching experience and those who do not. It seems that there is a need to keep the entry requirements for the vocational teacher education very clear and provide more guidance for those student teachers who have less work experience in the field.

Overall, this study more or less strengthens the findings which have been brought out in Lahtiranta and Penttilä's (2006) study about vocational teacher education and Vähäsantanen's (2004) Master's thesis about teacher students' opinions of vocational teacher education in Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. Like in Vähäsantanen's (2004, 49) research, the interviewees in this study had the opinion that you do not learn to be a teacher during the teacher education but the studies offer you theoretical tools to analyze your experiences in teaching and your development as a teacher. If you have prior experiences in teaching you can then reflect on those experiences and attach them to the theoretical knowledge that the vocational teacher education offers.

According to this study, the organizational and networking competence and R&D -competence were clearly represented in the English Program. The teacher students are networking while doing their teaching practice and developmental learning tasks in different educational organizations. Teacher students also network with each other and different experts of working life. R&D -competence is developed during the program by doing developmental learning tasks. Learning in the program is organized by learning tasks which aim at developing teaching practices and sharing ideas collaboratively. What comes to teaching competence and assessment and evaluation competence, the interviewees experienced that these competence areas were rather marginal in the English Program. They would have needed more practical tools to develop those competence areas, and felt that they were not covered well enough in the English Program at least in practical level.

Intercultural learning in the English Program was experienced as challenging but interesting. Stereotypical thinking of different cultures sits firm in our minds and the interviewees discussed this openly. The issue of language barrier was also brought into discussion by the interviewees. They expressed that there were not enough of open discussions of intercultural matters in the English Program and, that these kinds of discussions should be organized. They deduced that interaction in a multicultural group must be guided and instructed by paying more attention to the organization of the group. Some of the interviewees brought out that a

comparative method is a meaningful way to improve communication in a multicultural group when everyone can introduce their ideas based on different cultural values for the topic at hand.

For many of the interviewees, multiculturalism is a crucial and self-evident part of their lives. They do not feel a need to develop intercultural competence by taking part in intercultural training programs. Nevertheless, development of intercultural competence is a long-term, transformative learning process. One has to consciously commit oneself to it. Intercultural experiences form a solid ground for this process but they are not enough in terms of the development of the intercultural competence. One has to reflect on the issues of intercultural interaction in multiple perspectives and develop self-knowledge to be able to understand other cultures at a deeper level. (Manninen 2008.) Intercultural training should also cover whole institutions and their entire staff. As Harris and Moran (1996, 14) state it, all employees should learn about the influence of culture and be effective cross-cultural communicators if they are to work with minorities within their society or with foreigners encountered at home or abroad.

Intercultural matters and communication can be rather challenging. On the other hand one can learn a lot about oneself and others through that. As the interviewees mentioned, the pros for studying in a multicultural group are, for example, a diversified networking potential and richness of ideas. The study group in the English Program seemed to provide a safety network for many and the contacts inside the group were important. The interviewees experienced themselves as being quite separate from the Finnish teacher students and would have desired to have more interaction with them. They defined themselves to be “a separate island on the sea of teacher education”. The true multiculturalism for them would have meant that there are much more Finnish student teachers involved with the English Program. They also hoped for more informal gatherings in order to know each other better and Finnish students as well. The interviewees seemed really interested in each others’ experiences as being a teacher in Finland and how people have ascended in their careers as teachers. It seemed that there might be a need for alumni meetings for people who have graduated from the English Program. The interviewees experienced that networking with their teacher student colleagues was of major importance for them and these networks could be held up via alumni meetings.

What can be concluded of the interviews is that there is a need to improve methods for intercultural communication in every level of interaction in the vocational teacher education and the English Program. However, it is a delicate task to do since cultural differences should not

be underlined but still raised into discussion. Despite the differences between varying cultures and people, there is still a lot of shared “sameness”. In order to develop intercultural competence, one has to develop self-knowledge and this can be done by providing forums for reflection during the teacher education (Metsänen 2007).

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# Epilogue

*Leena Härkäpää & Riitta Larna*

## THE COUNSELORS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE HAAGA-HELIA AOKK TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

■ Since 2004, HAAGA-HELIA (formerly Helia) has been educating non-Finnish teachers in English who fulfill the basic requirements for a vocational teacher in Finland and reside permanently in the country. The need to train teachers in English is continually on the rise as instruction given in English is expanding in universities of applied sciences and vocational institutes. A small percentage of non-Finnish teachers already now teach in Finnish as well, and many of them also envision their future in a program, mainly vocational, taught in Finnish.

### The Early Phases of the Teacher Education Program in English

In December 2003, the first meeting in Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education was held to plan pedagogical studies for teachers in English (60 cr). The meeting was attended by teachers particularly interested in multicultural teacher education; the principle lecturers of the Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education, Leena Härkäpää, Riitta Larna and Irene Hein, who together also implemented the degree program throughout the period of 2004-2007 documented in the report. Leena Härkäpää and Riitta Larna worked together as counseling teachers for the vocational pedagogical studies (35 cr), and Irene Hein was responsible for the basic studies in pedagogy (25 cr).

It was already decided in the beginning that the teacher education program in English is intended for foreign residents who have lived in Finland for an extended period of time and whose proficiency in Finnish is inadequate for pursuing studies in a similar program taught in Finnish. The intention was not to create a kind of “language course” for students whose native language is Finnish, nor was it designed to attract students from abroad.

The degree program was announced in Finland's English language magazine *Six Degrees*, on the web pages of the Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education and in a few lines in the same announcements that were targeted to Finnish-speaking applicants. The teacher education program in English has attracted more than twice the number of applicants than available places. On the other hand, all applicants fulfilling requirements have been accepted to the program. In the early years, the intake group size has varied between 10-15 students. There have only been a couple of students who have dropped out of the program, so the graduation rate has been high.

Data on applicants and selected students is compiled in the attachment 3.

### **Studies in English during the Years 2004–2007**

In accordance with the curriculum, the studies commenced with a gathering in May. During the summer, the students read the assigned literature and completed an assignment. The next contact session was always planned on the basis of the previous one; the content was based on student wishes and needs as well as their expertise in various fields and how this could be used to everyone's advantage. Outside of contact sessions, students completed assignments and read related literature. During the contact sessions, the assignments were discussed collaboratively in small groups. Overall, every group has brought its own set of challenges and every year has been unique, with each program separately tailored for every incoming group.

The curriculum was the same in principle as the one implemented in Finnish. However, in practice it was noticed that much more information and discussion was desired, especially concerning the Finnish education system with its dual model as well as the field of vocational education with its competence recognition and validation, along with more general knowledge about the history of education in Finland. Since there is not much written in English about the aforementioned topics or the particular features of the Finnish education system, experts from the Finnish National Board of Education and the Trade Union of Education in Finland visited groups and shared current topical issues with the students.

Completed studies in pedagogy are significantly weighted in the admission point system. Pedagogical studies cannot be completed in English in Finnish universities; therefore, almost all the students admitted to the program took part in the basic studies in pedagogy taught in English.

One to two day-long sessions were held approximately once a month so that students felt continuously engaged in study. The study period came to an end in August of the following year with a closing ceremony and seminar, in which the new student teachers sat in the audience for the graduating group, who presented their development projects.

### **Becoming a qualified teacher and a member of Finnish society**

After completion of the pedagogical studies (60 cu), students received a certificate in English, which is a direct translation of the Finnish document. For many students who had been working as teachers, this official document made it possible to shift from a temporary to permanent status at work.

Niina Manninen, who completed the preceding report on teacher perspectives of the teacher education program in English, interviewed student teachers to find out how multiculturalism is addressed in the program taught in English. Admittedly, multiculturalism was not an objective of the program nor was it a focus of separate study, even though the topic naturally arose in discussions during the contact sessions. The purpose of the program has been the integration of non-Finnish-speaking student teachers in the field of vocational education in Finland. In fact, one teacher pointed out that he wants to be a qualified teacher in his field and not a qualified foreign teacher.

Nonetheless, teachers of non-Finnish backgrounds, by their mere presence, are advancing the practices of the Finnish education system toward a more multicultural direction. Gradually, the taken-for-granted aspects of Finnish education and the unwritten rules of its learning culture are opening up and becoming apparent to all parties.

One great challenge for society is how these skilled and qualified teachers can get employment in their respective fields as well as being treated equally to help develop the Finnish education system into a more multicultural one. One would think that there is a need for experts and developers in vocational education, especially if these same people possess multicultural skills and are networked internationally.

## Counseling Student Teacher Groups in English

### *The learning culture*

The assignments and teaching practice that form part of the pedagogical studies are designed such that the teacher should be engaged in some form of education and/or teaching, in order to conduct development-oriented research.

The student teachers, who were already employed as teachers or who believed that as a result of the teacher education program would become permanently employed, were able to draw up study plans that pleased them right from the start. Furthermore, they executed their study plans (in accordance with the instructions) so that colleagues at work were involved in discussions and the development projects. For those students already working as teachers, the studies served as a passport to gain greater access into the working community as a recognized expert.

The students' motivation to study varied by group. Perhaps the greatest motivator was whether a student had a job or not. There were only a few students who were wholly without a teaching job, but the subject came up in discussions from time to time. Students reacted strongly to unemployment, feeling that it takes a heavy toll on self-esteem. Student unemployment entailed a considerable amount of work and distress for counselors, who strove to ensure teaching practice in English for everyone so as to gain maximum benefit from the studies. In addition, many student teachers had been teaching in general education, so they also required teaching experience and practice in the field of vocational education.

The role of guidance counseling was often comprehensive in nature due to the student teachers' current situation in life. It is understandable that support and caring in counseling, in the students' opinion, were of primary importance. This is particularly the case if one has not yet completely integrated into Finnish society and contact with Finnish culture is weak. In the eyes of the student teacher, the teacher education program can seem like Finnish society in miniature, and for this reason, success in studies can determine his/her attitude to a large extent in the future.

For those student teachers who could not find work in their field, completing collaborative assignments (for an assignment exemplar, see attachment 4) proved to be difficult. As a result, one's outsider status was confirmed and motivation sank. Notwithstanding, some students completed their assignments with working colleagues, thereby expanding their professional network.

As the backgrounds of group members are so diverse and all are required to complete the same teacher education program as native Finns, it would be beneficial to all if the group rules agreed upon together would

share features with the working culture of the Finnish vocational education program.

The student teachers selected to the English language group are often well aware in the beginning of their studies that, in addition to being free of charge, education in Finland is flexible and “without strict rules.” Students sometimes felt it hard to believe that books on the reading list would not be included in tests, that reading them is not checked nor is the length of answers stated. However, it is much more challenging for students to apply what they have learned in their work than it is to simply repeat what they have read.

From the counselor’s perspective, it is the differences in learning cultures that is the true challenge. The learner-centered approach and the egalitarian teacher-student relationship typical in Finland are not always easy to internalize: students from different countries have differing opinions on the role of the teacher and student, which sometimes are strongly at odds.

The freedom of study and the freedom from constraints were confusing to many students. The personal study plan, or PSP, proved to be a valuable tool for giving students a clear picture of their studies when they were considering the limits of their freedom. Student teachers felt that, despite the personalization aspect of the PSP, they still had to take into consideration the interests of their workplace and the requirements of the vocational teacher education curriculum. The PSP made it clear that study is not a complete free-for-all, nor entirely personalized.

Happily, Niina Manninen’s report provides evidence that the interviewees felt that working in small groups was a valuable experience, in spite of the differences and conflicts. The finding is also a bit surprising, because the work in groups was not always without problems. On the other hand, those small groups that did function well accomplished outstanding examples of work. At times, it seemed that negative feedback, peer feedback and teacher feedback were easier to accept in a small group, whereas thanks would have been most appreciated individually. Perhaps due to the prevailing competitive spirit among groups, the students also desired to receive grades from individual assignments.

### ***English – A foreign language for the counselors and most student teachers***

English was not the native language of the counselors, the visiting lecturers and not even for most of the student teachers. For this reason, sometimes misunderstandings and unnecessarily strong emotional reactions came up in discussions. “What do you mean” or “I don’t understand at all” was certainly heard more often than in Finnish-speaking groups. Questions

sometimes forced native speakers of English (from England, Scotland, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Ghana and Zimbabwe) to carefully reconsider the precise meanings of different concepts. We have learned that grammatical correctness is relative, “evaluation” and “assessment” are the same thing, or then on the other hand, not at all. It depends on who is answering and perhaps who is doing the asking. We also learned that one can say *talk to* or *talk with*. They are both the same, then again not, or we can say that it is a question of power.

With the exception of the first group, we have also tried to include a few Finnish student teachers that have already been teaching in vocational education. They have naturally brought a Finnish vocational teacher perspective into the group discussions as well as teaching experience in various vocational fields.

It is requisite that there are two counselors involved in planning and leading the group: this collaboration between teachers sets a good example for future teachers about how to combine different kinds of expertise. Collaborative planning and peer support and assessment among counselors has also motivated and helped them to continue in very changing, and sometimes even surprising, counseling and teaching situations.

### ***Suggestions for improvement***

Vocational teacher education in English will continue to be offered in the future. Every new group brings along its own set of challenges, which makes each program implementation different. Networks should take on greater importance in studies, along with student services and counseling for students requiring special needs. It would be important that teachers teaching in English also get the opportunity for continuing education. However, the most crucial for integration is fluency in Finnish, thus more emphasis should be placed on such studies. Employers have made it clear that, in addition to professional skills, proficiency in Finnish is a prerequisite for employment, especially when the teacher’s work is increasingly in collaboration with colleagues and the business community in various projects.

**On the basis of our experience, we propose the following suggestions for the improvement of the teacher education program in English:**

- The possibility to study in English should be marketed better, also nationwide, so that those people who really need the education will apply to the program.
- In accordance with opportunities, there should be increased collaboration between the teacher education program, student teachers and employers.
- Collaboration with Finnish-speaking groups should be increased through common development projects, for example. This would increase the possibilities for non-Finns to network.
- Assignments should also be developed so that the student teacher's networks strengthen and grow as a result of completing them.
- The particular competences of the group, that is, the diverse pedagogical competences linked to multicultural competence, should be exploited and strengthened in the implementation of the program.
- Self-development skills should be further emphasized during the studies.
- The specific features of the Finnish education system and learning culture should receive more coverage during the program.
- There should be more in-depth and open discussion in groups about the different learning cultures.
- In the application phase, the applicant's oral proficiency as well as reading comprehension and writing skills in English should be assessed so that they are sufficient for group discussion and group work as well as reading the literature and writing assignments.
- Perhaps the entry level of the non-Finnish applicants in comparison with the Finnish-speakers would be more balanced if it were possible to study the basic studies in pedagogy in English beforehand.
- Since networking and teaching in a Finnish vocational education program requires at least a passing ability in Finnish, more Finnish speakers could take part in the English-speaking group so that Finnish would be part of some teaching and learning situations.
- It is recommended that the group would have two counselors – in considering the composition of the group, ideally one person would be a Finn and the other a non-Finn.

## Invitation to the group interview

**Invitation**

25.8.2008

*Dear Sir/Madam,*

Some time has passed since you finished your pedagogical studies in HAAGA-HELIA's Vocational Teacher Education Program.

We would like to arrange for you the opportunity to meet old friends and colleagues and contribute to the development of the Vocational Teacher Education Program in HAAGA-HELIA.

We are organizing group discussions/interviews for people who have graduated from HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education. The discussions will be organized for English-speaking groups only. The purpose of the group discussions is to gather together and share ideas/evaluate the Teacher Education Program in HAAGA-HELIA's English-speaking group.

We will organize three meetings/group interviews. The meetings will take place in HAAGA-HELIA, in the Negotiation room (7221) on:

Tuesday 16.9.2008 at 5 p.m. (17.00-19.00)

Monday 22.9.2008 at 5 p.m. (17.00-19.00)

Tuesday 23.9.2008 at 2 p.m. (14.00-16.00)

We hope that you are able to take part in one of our discussion groups. Please enroll in one of our meetings by sending an e-mail or phoning to Niina Manninen by 5.9.2008.

Kindest regards,

*Niina Manninen*

Intern

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Some refreshments will be served in the beginning of the group discussions/interviews.



## Attachment 2

Themes of discussion in the group interview

### Themes of discussion

#### (group interviews: 16<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of September)

Coffee and refreshments (about 30 min), introducing oneself shortly (current workplace etc.)

Interview: 90 min

#### A) General evaluation of the program

- 1) What are the core skills of a vocational teacher? (in Finland) ("warm up discussion")
- 2) Considering your work experience in teaching profession describe your thoughts and feelings of the teacher education in HAAGA-HELIA. (Former HELIA)
  - What were your most remarkable/useful learning experiences during the teacher education?
  - What kind of competencies, gained by the teacher education, you have been able to make use of?
- 3) Considering the competence areas of a vocational teacher competence, how the teacher education has developed your:
  - Guidance counseling/teaching competence
  - Organizational and networking competence
  - Research and Development competence (R&D)
  - Assessment and evaluation competence
  - What do you think about the basic pedagogical studies in the Vocational Teacher Education? (Practicality, usefulness etc.)

It might help you if you think about these competences in comparison to the core assignments which you have completed during your studies.

Links to the curriculums:

Curriculum 2004-2005 (Please see the attached Pdf-file)

[http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/vocational-teacher-education/attachment/curriculum\\_2005\\_2006.pdf](http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/vocational-teacher-education/attachment/curriculum_2005_2006.pdf)

[http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/vocational-teacher-education/attachment/curriculum\\_2006-2007.pdf](http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/vocational-teacher-education/attachment/curriculum_2006-2007.pdf)

#### 4) Finding your own teacher identity

- Were you able to make use of your work/life experiences in the education?
- Did your reflective skills develop during the Teacher Education?

#### B) Multicultural Issues and Intercultural Learning in the English Program

##### 5) Learning in a multicultural group

- What does multiculturalism mean in your present work?
- PROS of multicultural study group
- CONs of multicultural study group
- Did studying in the multicultural group affect your views and understanding of intercultural issues? In what ways?
- Did you have interaction with the Finnish teacher students?
- What kind of interaction would be beneficial both for the English group and the Finnish teacher students?
- What could you teach to the Finnish students about studying in a multicultural group?
- What kind of topics of discussion should be included in the intercultural training for the English Program if some training would be organized?

- C) Development ideas for the English Program
  - 6) Development ideas for the English Program and continuing education
    - What kind of development ideas do you have for the Vocational Teacher Education?
    - What kind of topics would you like to study in the future (continuing education)?
    - What else would you like to comment/add on this discussion

### Background information on the student teachers in the English-speaking group (n=38)

In 2004, 10 student teachers were accepted into the teacher education program in English, 15 people in 2005 and 13 in 2006. In other words, all qualified applicants were accepted into the program. Two students have postponed their studies and the status of two students is incomplete. The following information has been collected on the basis of the applications of students who have started their studies.

In the years 2004, 2005 and 2006, the 38 students selected\*) to the program hail from the following continents and countries: 16 from Europe (Bulgaria 3, Great Britain 3, France 3, and Finland 3 – with one Swedish speaker. One person each for Ireland, Switzerland, Portugal and Poland), 4 from Russia, 4 from the Middle East (2 from Iraq, and one from Egypt and Palestine), 3 from Africa (Ghana 2 and one from Zimbabwe), 5 from the United States, and one from Canada and Peru. One applicant was a so-called global citizen, whose mother is Finnish, but has lived in many countries and speaks several languages at home. Eight people in the group have received Finnish citizenship and three are native Finns by birth, who were part of the group due to their international experience.

Twelve students reported English as their native language, the other languages spoken by the group were Bulgarian, French, Finnish, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Arabic, Bengali, Japanese, Akan (Ghana) and Spanish.

The applicants represented a diversity of educational backgrounds and fields, with Linguistics having the largest share (9). Other fields were Business Administration and Commerce (5), Economics (3), Communication and Information Technology (3), Telecommunications (2) and Theology (2), as well as one person from the following areas: Data Processing, Biotechnology, Foodstuffs Technology, Chemistry, Political Science, Architecture and Construction, Graphic Design and Communication Technology, Tourism, Environmental Studies, Geography and Mathematics.

Twenty-two student teachers resided in the Helsinki metropolitan area (Helsinki 13, Espoo 5, Vantaa 4, Kirkkonummi 2, Nurmijärvi 1), 4 were from Turku, one from Parainen, Porvoo, Lahti, Imatra, Uusikaarlepyy and Rovaniemi.

Approximately half of the student teachers (18) were born in the 1970's; therefore, they were in their 30's at the time of study. One third (13) were in their 40's and about one-fifth (7) were in their 50's.

Nearly half (16) of the student teachers had reported in their applications that their workplace – either as a full-time or part-time employee – was a university of applied sciences, two were vocational schools and 10 were other educational institutions. Three people were employed in companies and only three people were unemployed at the time of application to the teacher education program.

\*) In this report Niina Manninen has included 33 student teachers who had completed their studies by the time of this research.

## Attachment 4

### ASSIGNMENT 3

# THE ANALYSIS OF VOCATIONAL LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION – LEARNING AT MY OWN WORKPLACE (4 CR)

Learning is a prerequisite for change and development in all organizations. In order to further improve the learning process, it is important that learning, concepts and tools related to learning in your own work environment are discussed.

The purpose of this assignment is to find answers to questions like: What kind of learning is taking place at your workplace? What kinds of learning concepts are used? Why? Who is learning? What are the contents and where are they coming from? What are you aiming at with learning? What are the tools you use for this aim?

Please follow these steps when completing the assignment:

#### STAGE I: Preparing

**Read the assigned literature.** Pay special attention to those concepts and contents that will be of use to you in examining the teaching and learning in your own organization. The view of learning is visible in the documents, curriculum, assignments, evaluation forms and various strategic documents. **Make a didactic plan** for a group of people within your organization (e.g., a close team, close colleagues, people of various cooperative projects) to discuss what kind of learning is taking place where you work. **Send your plan** to our BlackBoard-forum **latest on November 13.2005**  
**Invite the group of colleagues for the discussion.**

#### STAGE II: Discussion on learning

Start in the group the discussion (according to your plan) on crucial themes and concepts of vocational learning and teaching in your organization. As a chairperson, you are responsible for the "quality" and results in the discussion. **Record the discussion.**

#### STAGE III: Analysis of the learning and suggestions for improvement

**Analyze the discussion and draw some conclusions** in 3-4 pages using the literature attached. Do also notice the germs to develop during the discussion. You can use various documents as attachments (e.g. teaching plans, assignments, assessment forms etc.). **Send the analysis to the members** of the discussion group. Feel free to include possible feedback given by discussion members after reading your analysis. Consider, if this analysis can be a part of your developmental project.

#### Reading Material

Tuomi-Gröhn, T. & Engeström, Y. 2003. Conceptualizing Transfer: From Standard Notions to Developmental Perspectives. In T. Tuomi-Gröhn and Y. Engeström (eds.) *Between education and work: New perspectives on transfer and boundary crossing.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Engeström, Y. 2001. Expansive Learning at Work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 133-156.

Fenwick, T. 1999. Classifying Alternate Perspectives in Experiential Learning. Paper presented in AERC Conference.

Hakkarainen K. & Paavola, S. & Lipponen L. 2004. From communities of practise to innovative knowledge communities. *Lifelong Learning in Europe 2/2004*. Pp.75-83.